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(54) Method for production of hydrophilic polymer.

(57) A method for the production of a hydrophilic polymer by the polymerization of a liquid containing an aqueous hydrophilic monomer solution in a reaction vessel provided with at least one rotary stirring blade, which comprises polymerising said hydrophilic monomer in a reaction vessel wherein, at least a portion of the inner wall surface of said reaction vessel repeatedly exposed to said aqueous solution or said hydrophilic polymer and a gas has the surface roughness, R_{max} , thereof adjusted to not more than 3 μm and at the same time said portion of the inner wall of surface is kept cooled constantly to a temperature of not more than 70°C from behind said portion with a cooling medium.

Description**METHOD FOR PRODUCTION OF HYDROPHILIC POLYMER**

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**Field of the Invention:**

This invention relates to a method for the production of a hydrophilic polymer, especially an absorbent polymer. More particularly, it relates to a method for the production of a hydrophilic polymer, which method is such that the hydrophilic polymer being formed within a reaction vessel does not entail the occurrence of a hydrated gel of the hydrophilic polymer liable to adhere to the inner wall of the reaction vessel and, therefore, the hydrophilic polymer can be obtained stably and efficiently.

15 Description of the Prior Art:

Heretofore, cross-linked polymers having acrylic acid or salts thereof as main components have been widely utilized in disposable diaper, sanitary articles, agricultural/horticultural soil conditioners, and dehydrators, for example.

As concerns the manner of producing such cross-linked polymers, an aqueous solution polymerization disclosed in USP 4,625,001 is known. In this method, an aqueous solution of a monomer is polymerized using a two-arm type kneader disclosed in Figs. 1 and 2 of the USP 4,625,001 to obtain a hydrated gel-like polymer possessing a cross-linked structure and drying and to pulverize the polymer thereby producing a cross-linked polymer, for example. When the production is carried out by this method, however, and adhesive hydrated gel occurs during the course of polymerization of the monomer and adheres to the inner wall of the reaction vessel to an extent of lowering the yield and, at the same time, impairing the efficiency of the work of removing the produced hydrophilic polymer from the reaction vessel. As the amount of the production increases, the deposit of the hydrated gel on the inner wall of the reaction vessel continues to grow. The reaction vessel, therefore, requires a periodic cleaning work. This fact seriously degrades the productivity of the conventional method. The trouble of this nature occurs particularly conspicuously on the portion of the inner surface of the reaction vessel which is exposed repeatedly to the reactants and the gas formed mainly of inert gas.

For the solution of this problem, USP 4,625,001 discloses as a preferred embodiment a method which comprises carrying out the polymerization reaction for the production of a hydrated gel polymer possessing a cross-linked structure in a kneader lined with a fluorine resin coating and Japanese Patent Laid-Open SHO 57(1982)-63,305 discloses a method which comprises performing the polymerization reaction for the production of a water-soluble gel polymer in a vessel lined with a fluorine resin coating as a preferred embodiment. In actuality, however, the fluorine resin coating cannot be called fully effective in precluding the adhesion of the gel polymer. The effectiveness of the fluorine resin coating in inhibiting the deposition is degraded as the number of cycles of reaction increases. Thus, these methods still entail the problem of inevitably requiring periodically repeated application of the coating.

Japanese Patent Laid-Open SHO 54(1979)-10,387 discloses a method which carries out the polymerization reaction for the production of an aqueous gel polymer in a polymerization vessel possessing an electrolytically polished stainless steel surface. Actually, however, this method is inferior to the method relying on the fluorine resin coating in terms of the ability to preclude the deposition of the polymer.

An object of this invention is to provide a novel method for the production of a hydrophilic polymer.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a method for producing a hydrophilic polymer stably with high operational efficiency.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

These objects are accomplished by a method for the production of a hydrophilic polymer by the polymerization of a liquid containing an aqueous hydrophilic monomer solution in a reaction vessel provided with at least one rotary stirring blade, which comprises polymerizing said hydrophilic monomer in a reaction vessel wherein at least a portion of the inner wall surface of said reaction vessel repeatedly exposed to said aqueous solution or said hydrophilic polymer and a gas has the surface roughness, R_{max} , thereof adjusted to not more than 3 μm and, at the same time, said portion of the inner wall surface is kept cooled constantly to a temperature of not more than 70°C from behind said portion with a cooling medium.

In accordance with the method of this invention, the inner wall of the reaction vessel used for the polymerization reaction is adjusted to a specific surface condition and is kept cooled from behind the rear surface and the adjustment of the surface condition and the cooling thereof from behind manifest a conspicuous synergistic effect in preventing the deposition of the reactant on the inner wall of the reaction vessel. Even when the number of batches of reaction grows, therefore, the reaction vessel shows virtually no decrease in the substantial available volume thereof and permits a notable decrease in the frequency of

periodic cleaning works. The method of the present invention, therefore, enjoys a remarkable improvement in the productivity of the hydrophilic polymer.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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- Fig. 1 is a diagram of a rotary stirring blade provided for a reaction vessel used in Control 1,
 Fig. 2 is a schematic front view of a reaction vessel used in Control 1,
 Fig. 3 is a diagram illustrating the condition of deposition of substances on the inner wall of the reaction vessel after 20 batches of polymerization reaction of Control 1, 10
 Fig. 4 is a diagram illustrating the condition of deposition of substances on the surface of the rotary stirring blade after 20 batches of polymerization reaction of Control 1,
 Fig. 5 is a schematic front view of a reaction vessel used in Example 1,
 Fig. 6 is a schematic plane view of a reaction vessel used in Example 1, 15
 Fig. 7 is a diagram illustrating the condition of deposition of substances on the inner wall of the reaction vessel after 20 batches of polymerization reaction of Example 4,
 Fig. 8 is a diagram illustrating the condition of deposition of substances on the surface of the rotary stirring blade of Example 4,
 Fig. 9 is a schematic front view of a reaction vessel in Example 6, 20
 Fig. 10 is a diagram of a reaction vessel of Example 6 divested of the upper lid and viewed from above,
 Fig. 11 is an explanatory diagram illustrating in side elevation the reaction vessel of Example 6, and
 Fig. 12 is a cross-sectional view of Fig. 11 along with a line XII-XII.

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EXPLANATION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Now, the present invention will be described in detail below.

The reaction vessel for use in this invention has no specific restriction except for the sole requirement that it should possess at least one rotary stirring blade. It is preferable to be capable of imparting a shearing force due to rotation of rotary stirring blades to a hydrated gel polymer being formed in consequence of the advance of solution polymerization of a monomer as disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,625,001, for example. For this purpose, the reaction vessel is preferable to have a plurality of rotary stirring blades. The reaction vessels which meet this description include a single-screw mixer, a single-screw extruder, a twin-screw kneader, and a triple-screw kneader, for example. 30

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The reaction vessel to be used in the present invention has a construction described above, has at least the portion of the inner wall surface thereof for repeated exposure to the reactant adjusted to a surface roughness, R_{max} , of not more than 3 μm , and is provided on the reverse side of the portion of the inner wall surface for repeated exposure with a cooling device. The expression "portion of the inner wall surface for repeated exposure" as used in this invention refers to the portion of surface which is repeatedly exposed to the various motions produced mainly in the vertical direction alternately by the reactant, i.e. the aqueous solution of monomer or the hydrophilic polymer, and the gas formed mainly of an inert gas owing to the work of stirring to be performed during the course of the polymerization and which is out of the reach of the physical force such as, for example, sliding to be generated by the stirrer for the removal of the deposited substance. It is generally on this portion that the deposition occurs most heavily. This portion of repeated exposure generally is located in the proximity of the interface between the reactant and the gas, though it is variable with the behavior and form of the reactant and the condition of stirring. At times, this portion expands throughout the entire inner wall surface of the reaction vessel. The portion of repeated exposure, therefore, is to be determined in due consideration of the behavior and form of the reactant, the condition of stirring, etc. 40

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For the reaction vessel to be used for the production by the method of this invention, it is an essential condition that the reaction vessel should possess at least in the portion of the inner wall surface thereof exposed repeatedly to the reactant and the gas surface roughness adjusted to the specific value mentioned above and should be provided with a construction capable of cooling the rear side of the portion of repeated exposure (hereinafter referred to as cooling construction). Either or both of the adjustment of surface roughness and the cooling construction may cover the entire portion of repeated exposure or the entire inner wall surface of the reaction vessel. Where the reactant requires a heat treatment of over 70°C during the course of the production of the hydrophilic polymer, the cooling construction must be limited to the portion of repeated exposure to the reactant and the gas or to the upper part of the reaction vessel including the portion of repeated exposure and the lower part of the reaction vessel must be furnished with a heat-treating device. Where no heat treatment is required during the course of the production of the hydrated gel polymer, the cooling construction is preferable to embrace the entire inner wall surface of the reaction vessel. 50

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The provision of the cooling construction for the reaction vessel on the rear side thereof may be attained by various means. For example, a device for spraying a cooling medium such as water a jacket and a spiral tube capable of injecting and discharging the cooling medium in a desired flow rate may be cited. Where the reactant possesses a high adhesive property and adheres heavily to the stirrer, it is preferable to form a 60

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cooling medium path inside the rotary stirring blades and consequently provide a cooling construction for the rotary stirring blades themselves so as to keep the surface of the rotary stirring blades cooled inwardly with the cooling medium such as water.

For the present invention, at least the portion of repeated exposure in the entire inner wall surface of the reaction vessel is required to possess a surface roughness, R_{max} , of not more than 3 μm . The term "surface roughness, R_{max} ," as used in this invention refers to the magnitude of R_{max} which is defined in Japanese Industrial Standard (JIS) B0601. If the surface roughness, R_{max} , exceeds 3 μm , the conspicuous effect in preventing the deposition is not attained. A particularly conspicuous effect in the prevention of the deposition is attained by adjusting the surface roughness, R_{max} , to a level not more than 0.5 μm , preferably not more than 0.1 μm . The adjustment of the surface roughness, R_{max} , to a level of not more than 3 μm can be attained by the method of polishing with a buff. For the magnitude of R_{max} to be further decreased and for the surface smoothness to be consequently improved, the surface already polished by buffing is preferable to be subjected to immersion electrolytic polishing or electrolytic composite polishing. The adjustment of surface roughness described above must be given to at least the portion of repeated exposure in the entire inner wall surface of the reaction vessel. When the portion other than the portion of repeated exposure in the entire inner wall surface or the surface of the rotary stirring blades may be adjusted to the surface roughness defined above or adjusted suitably by the fluorine resin coating, for example. From the viewpoint of durability, however, the adjustment of surface roughness to the defined level described above is preferable to be given to the entire inner wall surface from the deposition. Where the reactant possesses a conspicuous adhesive property, this adjustment is preferable to be given further to the surface of the rotary stirring blades.

The reaction vessel to be used in the present invention possesses the surface roughness and the cooling construction on the rear side as described in detail above. During the course of the polymerization, the surface roughness and the rear side cooling construction manifest a conspicuous synergistic effect in preventing the hydrophilic polymer from adhering to the inner wall surface. This desirable result is not obtained when either the surface roughness or the rear side cooling construction is not fulfilled.

Concrete configurations of the reaction vessel to be used in the present invention are shown in Fig. 3, Fig. 4, Fig. 9, Fig. 10, and Fig. 11.

In the production of the hydrophilic polymer by the aqueous solution polymerization of a monomer destined to form the hydrophilic polymer in the reaction vessel described in detail above, the method of the present invention is accomplished by carrying out the polymerization reaction in the well-known procedure while keeping at least the prescribed portion of repeated exposure in the entire inner wall surface of the reaction vessel cooled from the rear side to a temperature of not more than 70°C by the use of a cooling medium such as, for example, water. For the prevention of the deposition to be manifested more effectively, the cooling from the rear side is preferable to be given to the entire upper part of the reaction vessel including the prescribed portion of repeated exposure. Where the polymerization reaction does not require any special heat treatment, the cooling is preferable to be given to the entire inner wall surface of the reaction vessel. Where the deposition is observed to occur additionally on the surface of the rotary stirring blades, it is preferable to have a cooling water path distributed in advance inside the rotary stirring blades and keep the surface of the rotary stirring blades from inside by passing cooling water at a temperature of not more than 70°C through the cooling water path.

If the temperature of the cooling water exceeds 70°C, the prevention of the deposition cannot be fully obtained. The effect of the cooling is heightened in proportion as the temperature of the cooling water decreases. The temperature of the cooling water is in the range of -10° to 60°C, preferably 0° to 50°C, more desirably 0° to 40°C, and most preferably 0° to 30°C. The cooling by the use of the cooling medium must be performed constantly between the time the polymerization reaction is started and the time it is completed. The cooling treatment is preferable to be continued while the hydrated gel polymer is removed from the reaction vessel after the completion of the polymerization reaction.

The monomer to be used in the present invention is a compound which, on being subjected preferably to aqueous solution polymerization, forms a cross-linked structure may be what is produced by the copolymerization of a water-soluble monomer and a cross-linking monomer possessing at least two polymerizing double bonds within the molecular unit thereof. For example, this cross-linked structure may be obtained by subjecting a hydrophilic monomer to aqueous solution polymerization in the presence of a hydrophilic macromolecule such as starch, cellulose, or polyvinyl alcohol thereby simultaneously effecting polymerization and formation of a graft bond or complex.

The hydrophilic monomers which are usable in the present invention include acrylic acid, methacrylic acid, 2-acrylamide-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid, 2-(meth)acryloylethanesulfonic acids, alkali metal salts or ammonium salts thereof, acrylamide, methacrylamide, acrylonitrile, 2-hydroxyethyl(meth)acrylates, methyl acrylate, and maleic acid, for example. One member or a mixture of two or more members selected from the group of hydrophilic monomers enumerated above may be used.

The cross-linking monomers which are usable in this invention include di(meth)acrylate of ethylene glycol, diethylene glycol, triethylene glycol, polyethylene glycol, propylene glycol, 1,4-butanediol, 1,5-pentanediol, 1,6-hexanediol, neopentyl glycol, glycerol, trimethylolpropane, pentaerythritol and the like, tri(meth)acrylates of glycerol, trimethylol propane, pentaerythritol and the like, tetra(meth)acrylate of pentaerythritol and the like, N,N'-methylenebisacrylamide, N,N'-methylenebis(methacrylamide), and triallyl isocyanurate, for example. One member or a mixture of two or more members selected from the group of cross-linking monomers

enumerated above may be used.

Of the monomers mentioned above, it is particularly preferable to use in the present invention (A) the monomer at least one member or a mixture of two or more members selected from acrylic acid, methacrylic acid, and alkali metal salts and ammonium salts thereof and (B) a cross-linking monomer possessing at least two polymerizing double bonds in the molecular unit in respective amounts such that the ratio of (B) the cross-linking monomer to (A) the monomer is in the range of 0.001 to 50 mol%, preferably 0.01 to 10 mol%. As (B) the cross-linking monomer, at least one member or a mixture of two or more members selected from the group of cross-linking monomers mentioned above can be used. If the amount of (B) the cross-linking monomer to be used herein is less than 0.001 mol% based on (A) the monomer, the hydrated gel polymer consequently obtained is soft and possesses viscosity. Owing to the viscosity, the polymer tends to retain the bulky state thereof and defy size reduction on exposure to a mechanical shearing force. If the amount exceeds 50 mol%, the cross-linked polymer consequently obtained is deficient in water-absorbing property and ion-exchange capacity.

The reaction vessel to be used in the present invention is provided with rotary stirring blades. It is preferable to be capable of imparting a shearing force due to the rotation of the rotary stirring blades to the hydrated gel polymer which is formed in consequence of the advance of the polymerization. A single-screw mixer and a twin-screw kneader (hereinafter referred to collectively as "kneader") may be mentioned as examples of the reaction vessel meeting the description given above. The kneader is used so that the two rotary stirring blades are rotated at an equal speed or different speeds in the mutually opposite directions. When the two rotary stirring blades are rotated at one equal speed, they are used in such a state that their radii of rotation partly overlap each other. When they are rotated at two different speeds, they are used in such a state that their radii of rotation avoid overlapping each other. The rotary stirring blades may be of the sigma type, the S type, the Bambury type, or the fish tail type.

For the polymerization induced in the reaction vessel used in the present invention to proceed under an atmosphere inert to the reaction of radical polymerization, the gas entrapped in the reaction vessel is preferable to be displaced with an inert gas in advance of the polymerization. For the purpose of condensing the steam generated by the heat of the polymerization reaction, the reaction vessel is preferable to be provided in the upper part thereof with a reflux condenser. Otherwise, the mixture generated in the reaction vessel may be expelled from within the reaction vessel by introducing an inert gas therein.

For the purpose of initiating the radical aqueous solution polymerization of the monomer in the present invention, any of the known water-soluble radical polymerization initiators may be used. Examples of the polymerization initiators are persulfates, hydrogen peroxide, and water-soluble azo compounds. Such a known water-soluble radical polymerization initiator may be used by itself. Optionally, it may be used in the form of a redox type initiator as combined with a sulfite, a hydrogen sulfite, a thiosulfate, an L-ascorbic acid, or a ferrous salt. The amount of the polymerization initiator to be used is in the range of 0.001 to 5 mol%, preferably 0.01 to 1 mol%, based on the amount of the monomer.

The particles of hydrophilic polymer obtained by the method of this invention can be used in their unmodified form satisfactorily as absorbent, water-retaining agent, ion-exchange resin, and adsorbent, for example. They are, however, preferable to be dried for the sake of convenience of handling. The cross-linked polymer obtained by drying may be used in its unmodified form of coarse powder or in a finely divided form as an absorbent, a water-retaining agent, an ion-exchange resin, an adsorbent, or a desiccant, for example. The average particle diameter of the hydrophilic polymer powder is generally in the range of 0.05 to 5 mm, preferably 0.1 to 1 mm.

Now, the present invention will be described more specifically below with reference to working examples. It should be noted, however, that this invention is not limited by the following examples.

Control 1

A reaction vessel 5 (see Fig. 2) was obtained by preparing a lidded twin-screw kneader possessing two rotary stirring blades 6 (see Fig. 1) each of a sigma type vane 110 mm in radius of rotation, provided with a thermometer 1, measuring 10 liters in inner volume, 240 mm x 220 mm in area of the opening, and 260 mm in depth, and having the bottom part thereof and the lateral part thereof to a height of 100 mm from the bottom covered with a jacket 4 and a side jacket (not shown) at the both sides of the bearings (not shown) of the shafts of the stirring blades 6, and then finishing the inner wall of the kneader and the surface of the rotary stirring blades with a buff # 200 thereby adjusting the surface roughness thereof, R_{max} , to 0.7 μ m. Nitrogen gas was blown into the reaction vessel by feeding nitrogen from a nitrogen gas inlet 2 to displace the entrapped air and exhausting air from an outlet 3. In this reaction vessel, an aqueous monomer solution prepared by dissolving 2 g of N,N'-methylenebisacrylamide in 5.5 kg of an aqueous acrylic acid solution having 75 mol% thereof neutralized with caustic soda and bubbling nitrogen gas through the resultant solution was placed and an aqueous solution of 5 g of ammonium persulfate in 30 g of water and an aqueous solution of 0.1 g of L-ascorbic acid in 5 g of water were added thereto. At this time, cooling water kept at a temperature of 30°C was passed through the jacket 4 and the side jacket and the rotary stirring blades 6 were rotated at a rate of 30 rpm. The monomer began to polymerize at a liquid temperature of 30°C. After 5 minutes 30 seconds following the start of the polymerization, the temperature reached a peak of 90°C. Then, for 15 minutes, the stirring with the rotary stirring blades 6 and the cooling with the cooling water were continued to age the polymer. Thereafter, the gel polymer consequently formed was recovered. Then, a total of 20 batches of polymerization

were carried out by repeating the procedure described above. Of the inner wall surface (see Fig. 3) of the reaction vessel which had been used for the 20 batches of polymerization and the surface of the rotary stirring blades (see Fig. 4), the parts answering the description of "portion of repeated exposure" were found to be covered with a large amount of deposit 9. An absorbent (A) obtained from the hydrated gel polymer produced in the 20th batch of polymerization was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content. The condition of gel deposition at the end of the 20th batch of polymerization and the results of the test are shown in Table 1. The absorption capacity and the soluble content of the absorbent polymer were determined by the following procedures.

A sample hydrated gel polymer was placed on a 50-mesh metallic gauze and dried with hot air at 150°C for 120 minutes. The dried polymer was pulverized with a shaking mill and classified with a 20-mesh metallic gauze. The powder which had passed the metallic gauze (hereinafter referred to as "absorbent") was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content by the following method. A bag of nonwoven fabric (40 mm x 150 mm) resembling a tea bag was uniformly packed with 0.2 g of the absorbent (A), kept immersed in an aqueous 0.9% common salt solution for 30 minutes, and then weighed. The same bag containing nothing was similarly immersed and the amount of the aqueous solution absorbed thereby was used as a blank. The absorption capacity of the absorbent (A) was calculated in accordance with the following formula.

$$20 \quad \text{Absorption capacity} = \frac{\text{Weight (g) of bag after absorption-blank (g)}}{\text{Weight (g) of absorbent}}$$

Then, 0.5 g of the absorbent (A) was dispersed in 1,000 ml of deionized water. The dispersed in 1,000 ml of deionized water. The dispersion was stirred for 30 minutes, then passed through a filter paper, No. 6. The solid content of the filtrate was weighed. The soluble content of the absorbent (A) was calculated in accordance with the following formula.

$$30 \quad \text{Soluble content} = \frac{\text{Weight of filtrate} \times \text{solid content of filtrate (wt\%)}}{0.5}$$

35 Example 1

In the place of the reaction vessel used in Control 1, a reaction vessel 15 (see Figs. 5 and 6) provided with a nitrogen gas inlet 12, an outlet 13 and a thermometer 11 was obtained by preparing a lidded twin-screw kneader possessing two rotary stirring blades 16 each of a sigma type vane having a radius of rotation of 110 mm and containing therein a cooling water path, measuring 10 liters in inner volume, 240 mm x 220 mm in area of the opening, and 260 mm in depth, and covered with the bottom part jacket 14, the upper part jacket 17, and the lateral part jacket 18 thereof covered with a jacket and then having the inner wall of the kneader and the surface of the rotary stirring blades subjected to Hitachi Shipbuilding & Engineering Co., Ltd. type electrolytic composite polishing to have the surface roughness, R_{max} , adjusted to 0.1 μm. The polymerization of a monomer was carried out by repeating the procedure of Control 1, except that cooling water kept at a temperature of 30°C was passed through all of the bottom jacket, upper jacket, lateral jacket, and a cooling water path in the rotary stirring blades. In each of the batches of polymerization, the peak temperatures of polymerization were in the range of 85° to 87°C. After a total of 20 batches of polymerization, absolutely no deposition was recognized on the parts of the inner wall of the reaction vessel and the surface of the rotary stirring blades which answered the description of "portion of repeated exposure." An absorbent (1) obtained from the hydrated gel polymer was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content in the same manner as in Control 1. The condition of gel deposition after the completion of the 20th batch of polymerization and the results of the test are shown in Table 1.

Control 2

55 The procedure of Example 1 was repeated, except that hot water kept at a temperature of 90°C was passed through the jackets and the cooling water path distributed inside the rotary stirring blades between the time the peak temperature was reached and the time the hydrated gel polymer was recovered in the place of the cooling water kept at a temperature of 30°C. Of the inner wall of the reaction vessel which had been used for a total of 20 batches of polymerization and the surface of the rotary stirring blades, the parts answering the description "portion of repeated exposure" were found to be covered with a large amount of deposit. An absorbent (B) obtained from the hydrated gel polymer was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content in the same manner as in Example 1. the condition of gel deposition after the completion of the 20th batch of polymerization and the results of the test are shown in Table 1.

Example 2

The procedure of Example 1 was repeated, except that the surface roughness, R_{max} , was adjusted to 0.5 μm by subjecting the surfaces to finishing with a buff of #400 and then to immersion electrolytic polishing instead. Of the inner wall of the reaction vessel which had been used for a total of 20 batches of polymerization and the surface of the rotary stirring blades, the parts answering the description "portion of repeated exposure" were found to be covered with a very small amount of deposit. An absorbent (2) obtained from the hydrated gel polymer was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content. The condition of gel deposition after the completion of the 20th batch of polymerization and the results of the test are shown in Table 1.

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Example 3

The procedure of Example 1 was repeated, except that hot water kept at a temperature of 90°C was passed in the place of the part of the cooling water at 30°C which was passed through the bottom part jacket 14 between the time the peak temperature was reached and the time the hydrated gel polymer was recovered. Similarly to Example 1, absolutely no deposit was recognized on the parts of the inner wall of the reaction vessel which had been used for a total of 20 batches of polymerization and the surface of the rotary stirring blades which answered the description of "portion of repeated exposure." An absorbent (3) obtained from the hydrated gel polymer was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content. The condition of gel deposition after the completion of the 20th batch of polymerization and the results of the test are shown in Table 1.

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Control 3

The procedure of Example 1 was repeated, except that hot water kept at a temperature of 90°C was passed in the place of the part of the cooling water at 30°C which was passed through the upper part and lateral part jacket between the time the peak temperature was reached and the time the hydrated gel polymer was recovered. A large amount of deposit was recognized on the parts of the inner wall of the reaction vessel which had been used for a total of 20 batches of polymerization and the surface of the rotary stirring blades which answered the description of "portion of repeated exposure." An absorbent (C) obtained from the hydrated gel polymer was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content. The condition of gel deposition after the completion of the 20th batch of polymerization and the results of the test are shown in Table 1.

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Example 4

The procedure of Example 1 was repeated, except that the surface roughness, R_{max} , was adjusted to 0.7 μm by finishing the surface with a buff #200 instead. A small amount of deposit 29 was recognized on the parts of the inner wall (see Fig. 7) of the reaction vessel which had been used for a total of 20 batches of polymerization and the surface (see Fig. 8) of the rotary stirring blades which answered the description of "portion of repeated exposure." An absorbent (4) obtained from the hydrated gel polymer was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content. The condition of gel deposition after the completion of the 20th batch of polymerization and the results of the test are shown in Table 1. The numerals plused 10 of the members in Figs. 5 and 6 express the same members in Figs. 7 and 8.

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Control 4

The procedure of Example 1 was repeated, except that a lidded twin-screw kneader possessing two rotary stirring blades each of a sigma type vane having a radius of rotation of 110 mm and containing a cooling water path, measuring 10 liters in inner volume, 240 mm x 220 mm in area of the opening, and 260 mm in depth, having the bottom part, the upper part, and the lateral part thereof covered with a jacket, and having the surface of the rotary stirring blades and the inner wall of the kneader adjusted to a surface roughness, R_{max} , of 3.5 μm was used instead. After a total of 9 batches of polymerization, a large amount of deposit was formed on the parts of the inner wall of the reaction vessel and the surface of the rotary stirring blades which answered the description of "portion of repeated exposure," rendering the continued use of the reaction vessel infeasible. An absorbent (D) obtained from the hydrated gel polymer was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content. The condition of gel deposition after the completion of the 9th batch of polymerization and the results of the test are shown in Table 1.

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Example 5

In the same reaction vessel as used in Example 1, nitrogen gas was blown in to displace the entrapped air. In this reaction vessel, an aqueous monomer solution prepared by dissolving 1,200 g of acrylic acid, 100 g of sodium 2-acrylamide-2-methylpropanesulfonate, 200 g of acrylamide, and 1.5 g of N,N'-methylenebisacrylamide in 4,000 g of water and bubbling nitrogen gas through the resultant aqueous solution was placed, and an aqueous solution of 0.6 g of an aqueous 35% hydrogen peroxide solution in 50 g of water, an aqueous solution of 1 g of L-ascorbic acid in 100 g of water, and an aqueous solution of 8 g of 2,2'-azobis(2-amidinopropane) hydrochloride (produced by Wako Pure Chemical Industries Ltd.) in 100 g of water were added thereto. At this time, cooling water kept at a temperature of 40°C was passed through a cooling water path distributed in the bottom part, upper part, and lateral part jacket and in the rotary stirring blades and the rotary stirring blades were rotated at a rate of 30 rpm. The polymerization reaction began, when the temperature of the aqueous solution in the reaction vessel reaches 37°C. After 8 minutes following the start of the polymerization, the liquid temperature reached a peak of 85°C. Then, the stirring with the rotary stirring blades and the cooling

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with the cooling water were continued for 5 minutes. Then, 1,400 g of sodium carbonate powder was added to the polymerization mixture to neutralize the polymer. The gel consequently formed was recovered. Thereafter, a total of 20 batches of polymerization was carried out by following the procedure described above. Absolutely no deposit was observed on the parts of the inner wall of the reaction vessel which had been used for a total of

5 20 batches of polymerization and the surface of the rotary stirring blades which answered the description of "portion of repeated exposure." An absorbent (5) obtained from the hydrated gel polymer was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content. The operational efficiency and the yield of the recovery of the hydrated gel polymer in the 20th batch of polymerization and the results of the test were as shown in Table 1.

10 Control 5

The procedure of Example 4 was repeated, except that the reaction vessel used in Control 1 was adopted in the place of the reaction vessel used in Example 5. A large amount of deposit was formed on the inner wall of the reaction vessel and the deposit in the form of rolls adhered to the rotary stirring blades during the 6th batch of polymerization. The hydrated gel polymer obtained during the 6th batch of polymerization contained lumps and, therefore, could not be easily disintegrated. An absorbent (E) obtained by drying the recovered polymer still contained undried hydrated gel. The results of the test are shown in Table 1.

Example 6

A reaction vessel (see Figs. 9 to 12) was obtained by preparing a lidded mixer possessing on rotary stirring blades 36 provided inside the central axis 40 thereof with a cooling water path, measuring 10 liters in inner volume, and having the bottom part jacket 34, the upper part jacket 37, the lateral part jacket (not shown), and top plate 45 covered with a jacket and then subjecting the entire inner wall surface of the mixer inclusive of the lid and the surface of the rotary stirring blades to Hitachi Shipbuilding & Engineering Co., Ltd. type electrolytic composite polishing thereby adjusting the surface roughness, R_{max} , to 0.1 μm . Nitrogen gas was blown in the reaction vessel to displace the entrapped air.

In the reaction vessel, with the rotary stirring blade kept in motion at 40 rpm, an aqueous monomer solution obtained by dissolving 106 kg of acrylic acid having 75 mol% thereof neutralized with sodium hydroxide and 96 g of N,N'-methylenebisacrylamide in 158 kg of water and bubbling nitrogen gas through the resultant solution, an aqueous solution of 240 g of ammonium persulfate in 1,440 g of water, and an aqueous solution of 4.8 g of L-ascorbic acid in 240 g of water were continuously introduced into the reaction vessel through inlets 41, respectively disposed in the reaction vessel over a period of 24 hours. At the same time, a hydrated gel polymer formed in consequence of the polymerization was continuously recovered. At this time, cooling water kept at a temperature of 30°C was incessantly passed through the cooling water path distributed in the jacket and the shaft of the rotary stirring blade. After 24 hours' continuous polymerization, absolutely no deposit was recognized on the inner wall of the reaction vessel and on the surface of the rotary stirring blade. An absorbent (6) obtained by drying the recovered polymer was tested for absorption capacity and soluble content. The results of the test were as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Example	Absorbent	Condition of gel deposition after stated number of batches of polymerization	Absorption capacity	Soluble content (wt%)
Control 1	(A)	Heavy deposition	44	9
Example 1	(1)	No deposition	43	5
Control 2	(B)	Heavy deposition	46	11
Example 2	(2)	Very slight deposition	43	5
Example 3	(3)	No deposition	45	6
Control 3	(C)	Heavy deposition	45	7
Example 4	(4)	Slight deposition	42	5
Control 4	(D)	Heavy deposition	46	13
Example 5	(5)	No deposition	47	10
Control 5	(E)	Heavy deposition	47	14
Example 6	(6)	No deposition	43	6

It is clearly noted from Table 1 that the occurrence of deposit was insignificant and the operational efficiency of the recovery of the hydrated gel polymer was satisfactory in the experiments resorting to the method of this invention. For the fixed monomer composition, the absorbent obtained by the method of the present invention showed the same absorption capacity as and a smaller soluble content than the absorbent obtained by the

method other than the present invention's.

Claims

1. A method for the production of a hydrophilic polymer by the polymerization of a liquid containing an aqueous hydrophilic monomer solution in a reaction vessel provided with at least one rotary stirring blade, which comprises polymerising said hydrophilic monomer in a reaction vessel wherein at least a portion of the inner wall surface of said reaction vessel repeatedly exposed to said aqueous solution or said hydrophilic polymer and a gas has the surface roughness, R_{max} , thereof adjusted to not more than 3 μm and at the same time said portion of the inner wall of surface is kept cooled constantly to a temperature of not more than 70°C from behind said portion with a cooling medium. 5

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the surface of said rotary stirring blade and the inner wall of said reaction vessel are formed of stainless steel or stainless cast iron. 10

3. A method according to claim 2, wherein said surface roughness is adjusted to not more than 0.5 μm . 15

4. A method according to claim 2, wherein said surface roughness is adjusted to not more than 0.1 μm . 10

5. A method according to claim 3, wherein said adjustment of said surface roughness is performed by immersion electrolytic polishing. 10

6. A method according to claim 3, wherein said adjustment of said surface roughness is performed by electrolytic composite polishing. 20

7. A method according to claim 1, wherein said reaction vessel possesses a plurality of rotary stirring blades. 10

8. A method according to claim 7, wherein said reaction vessel possessing a plurality of rotary stirring blades is a twin-screw kneader. 10

9. A method according to claim 1, wherein said adjustment of surface roughness is given to the entire inner wall surface of said reaction vessel. 25

10. A method according to claim 9, wherein said adjustment of surface roughness is given to the entire surface of said rotary stirring blades. 10

11. A method according to claim 1, wherein the entire inner wall surface of said reaction vessel is cooled with a cooling medium. 30

12. A method according to claim 11, wherein said rotary stirring blades are provided therein with a cooling medium path and the surface of said rotary stirring blades is cooled from within by the use of said cooling medium. 10

13. A method according to claim 1, wherein said monomer consists of (A) at least one monomer selected from the group consisting of acrylic acid, methacrylic acid, and alkali metal salts and ammonium salts thereof and (B) 0.001 to 50 mol%, based on (A) said monomer, of a cross-linking monomer. 35

14. A method according to claim 1, wherein the concentration of said aqueous monomer solution in the initial stage of polymerization is in the range of 10 to 50% by weight. 10

15. A method according to claim 1, wherein the temperature of the cooling medium is to 60°C. 10

16. A method according to claim 15, wherein the temperature of the cooling medium is to 50°C. 40

17. A method according to claim 16, wherein the temperature of the cooling medium is to 40°C. 10

18. A method according to claim 17, wherein the temperature of the cooling medium is to 30°C. 10

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FIG.1

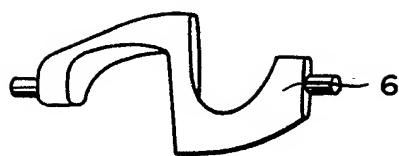


FIG.2

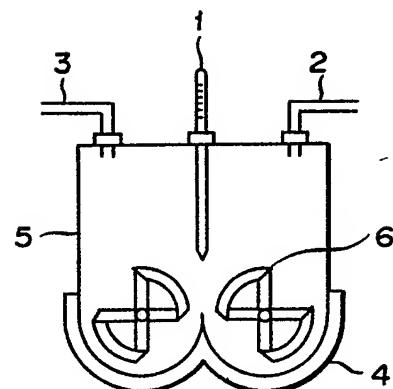


FIG.3

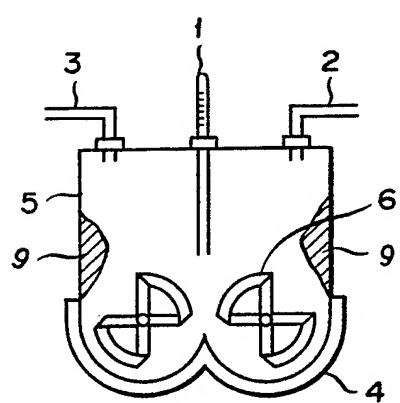


FIG.4

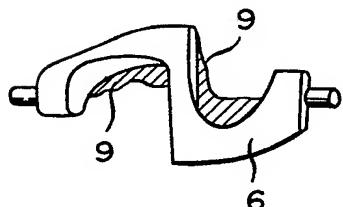


FIG.5

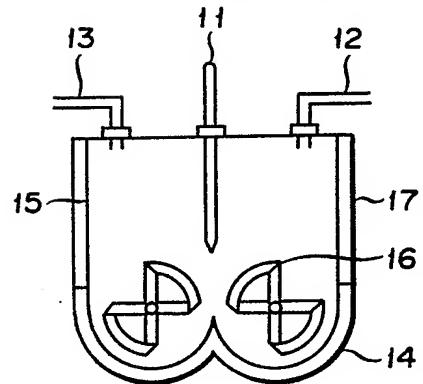


FIG.6

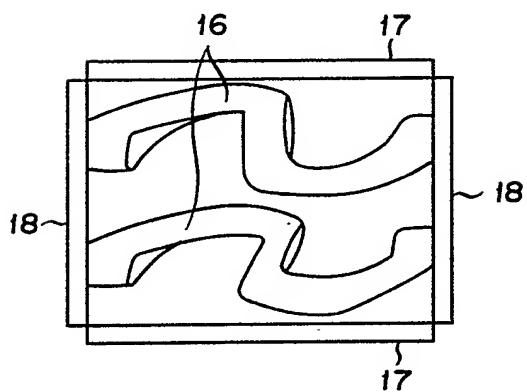


FIG. 7

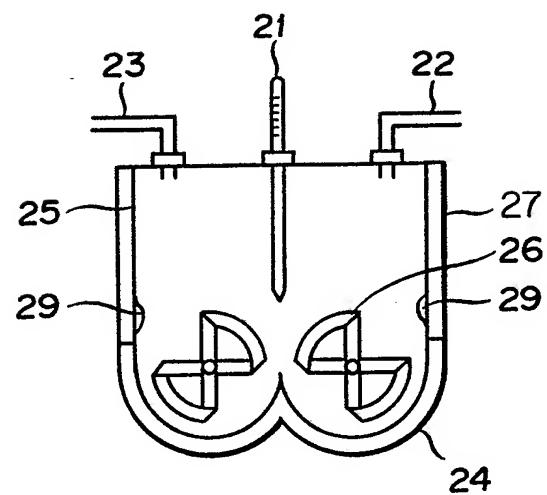


FIG. 9

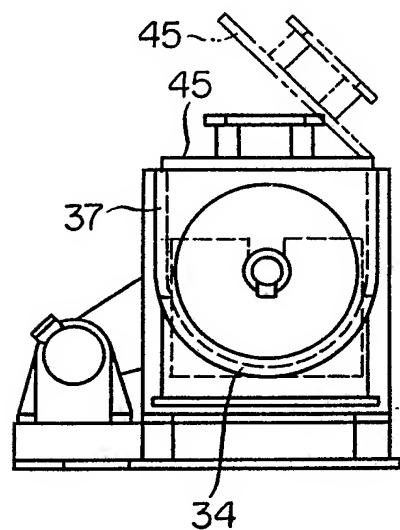


FIG. 8

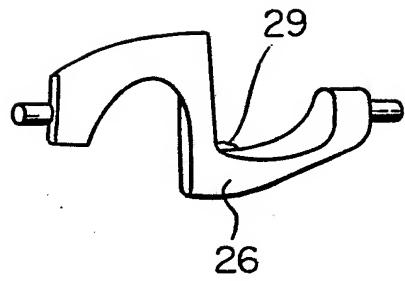


FIG.10

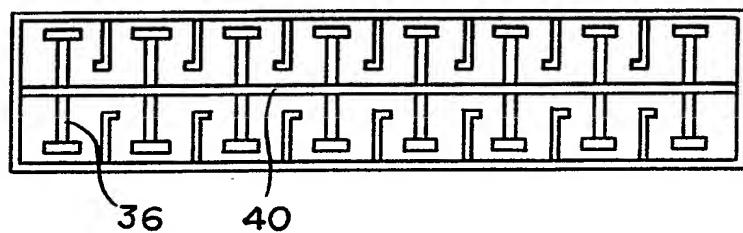


FIG.11

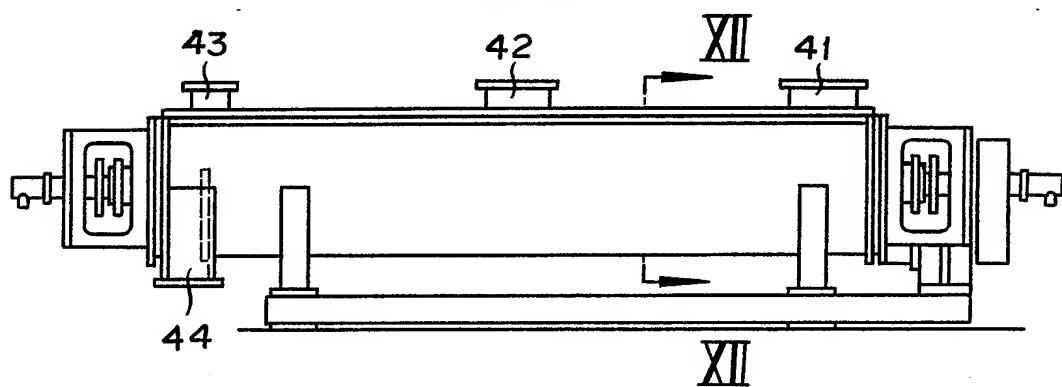
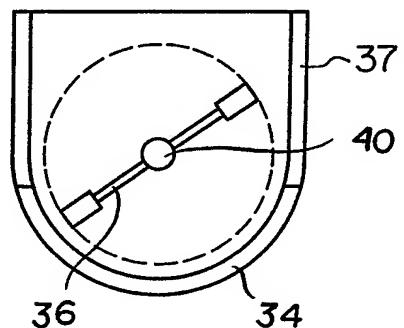


FIG.12



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ABSTRACT:

CHG DATE=19990617 STATUS=O> A method for the production of a hydrophilic polymer by the polymerization of a liquid containing an aqueous hydrophilic monomer solution in a reaction vessel provided with at least one rotary stirring blade, which comprises polymerising said hydrophilic monomer in a reaction vessel wherein, at least a portion of the inner wall surface of said reaction vessel repeatedly exposed to said aqueous solution or said hydrophilic polymer and a gas has the surface roughness, Rmax, thereof adjusted to not more than 3 μ m and at the same time said portion of the inner wall of surface is kept cooled constantly to a temperature of not more than 70 DEG C from behind said portion with a cooling medium.